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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, October 25, 1940

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SUBJECT: "BUYING BEEF BY GRADE." Information from the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S.D.A. Publications available: "U.S. Graded and Stamped Meat," Leaflet No. 122, and "Buying Beef by Grade," Miscellaneous Publication No. 392.

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This fall markets in the United States have generous supplies of meat for sale. You'll find plenty of beef, pork and lamb to give variety to family menus. Beef is a great favorite with American families from coast to coast. And this fall the markets happen to have a generous supply of better-grade beef.

Speaking of grades, do you know about the new simplified Government grades for beef? These new grades are the easiest and most accurate guides so far for the housewife and consumer to get her money's worth in beef. Price is not a sure guide to quality in meat. You can't be sure you're getting the best quality for what you pay unless you can see the grade name stamped on the meat or shown in some other way. You may have had long experience in buying meat for the family and still be disappointed every now and then in the piece you buy. Beef has a wide range of quality. It takes an expert to judge it. No wonder most housewives depend on their butcher to send them good meat.

But you don't have to depend on your butcher. The meat-grading and stamping service of the Government gives you a way to choose beef with reasonable assurance that you are getting the quality you want and are paying for. Government experts -- men who know beef -- carefully grade the meat at the packing plant. They mark the carcass with a roller stamp, so the grade name appears on each cut of beef, as the butcher sells it. The roller stamp marks the grade on the meat with a pure, harmless purple color which usually entirely disappears when the meat is cooked.

Before Government experts stamp the grade on the meat, they check on many points. They notice color, texture and grain of the meat. They notice how the meat is marbled -- that is, whether little streaks of fat run all through the lean. Well-marbled meat is tender and delicious. The experts also consider how much fat the meat has, what its color and character is, and how it is distributed. They also consider the proportion of edible, especially lean meat, to bone.

After they have checked all these points, they stamp the meat with one of 5 grades. These 5 simple grades are your guide to buying beef. If you know the names of the grades and what each stands for, you are well set to make a good buy in any store selling Government-graded meat. The grades running from top quality down are: Prime, Choice, Good, Commercial, and Utility.

Here is what those grade-names mean. Prime is the highest grade of beef. It sells mostly to exclusive hotels, restaurants, and clubs. Supplies of this fine meat are small and for sale mostly in the late fall and winter after the livestock shows. You rarely find any Prime grade beef for sale in retail markets. And many housewives would consider it uneconomical anyway because the meat contains so much fat. Here's what Prime grade beef looks like. The fat is firm, brittle and white or creamy white. The cut surface of the lean looks firm and velvety. The color is usually bright red. And the meat is thoroughly marbled -- even streaks of fat running all through the lean.

The next grade of beef is called Choice. Choice is the highest grade usually for sale at retail markets. Choice is the grade most families buy who demand and are willing to pay for high-quality beef. Choice grade beef has a moderately thick covering of white or creamy-white fat. The lean meat looks bright and is pale red to deep red in color. The cut surface of the lean looks smooth and velvety. And you'll notice considerable marbling.

Next to Choice comes the grade called Good. Good is the highest grade of beef selling in quantity all during the year in the big meat-eating centers of the United States. Beef with the grade of Good is the buy for the housewife who wants quality beef at moderate price. Good grade beef has a slightly thin fat covering that is creamy white with perhaps a yellowish tinge. The cut surface of the lean looks moderately smooth and velvety. The color is pale red to dark red, with some marbling.

The next lowest grade goes by the name of Commercial. A large percentage of all the beef produced is of this grade. People who want meat with very little fat, or who want leaner and lower-priced beef prefer Commercial to grades with more marbling and more fat covering. Commercial grade beef may not be quite so good as the higher grades for broiling and oven-roasting, but it is just as good for cooking in moist heat as in pot roasts, stews, and meat pies. The fat covering on Commercial grade beef is thin and may be slightly yellow and soft. The lean is light to dark red and looks somewhat soft and watery or slightly coarse. It shows little marbling.

The lowest grade customarily sold at retail is Utility. This grade sells as "block" beef mostly to families who must buy low-priced meat. It is not so good for broiling and roasting, but all right for pot roast, stew or other economical meat dishes. Utility grade beef has a thin covering of fat that is greyish white or yellow in color. The cut surface of the lean is usually soft and watery with no marbling, and light red to dark red in color.

This gives you a brief picture of each of the 5 new Government grades of beef. You can get more help in buying meat from 2 new leaflets published by the Department of Agriculture. These leaflets are free. While the supply lasts you are welcome to either one or both. One leaflet is called "Buying Beef by Grade," Miscellaneous Publication 392. The other is called "U.S. Graded and Stamped Meat," Leaflet 122. Send a postcard to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. for them.

